

# Helicopters a valuable tool

In keeping with Western's Strategic Plan objective to manage costs, our aviation program helps perform certain laborious, time-consuming and technical tasks more efficiently.

Western's new Bell 407 helicopter, based in Fort Collins, Colo., not only supports line crews throughout the Rocky Mountain region, but also provides support to environmental program staff and others working for our customers.

Western Pilot **Ken Host** takes pride in his new helicopter and emphasizes safety as his primary focus. All passengers must complete Host's comprehensive briefing before boarding the aircraft. The briefing raises the level of confidence for both pilot and passengers.

The Kremmling and Craig line crews especially appreciate Host's emphasis on safety, since they depend on aviation technology to save time when human resources are at a premium.

"Using the helicopter to run line patrol takes less than two days. Running the lines with all-terrain vehicles would take four weeks straight—and that's without getting pulled off the job to work on other problems. It's a great piece of equipment," said Kremmling Lineman **Sam Naill**.

While flying 75 to 100 feet above the ground, the linemen and pilot get up close and personal with the rough, mountainous terrain below.

"The majority of our lines are located in remote areas with extremely rough terrain, rendered inaccessible except by ATV. The helicopter allows a fast check of our

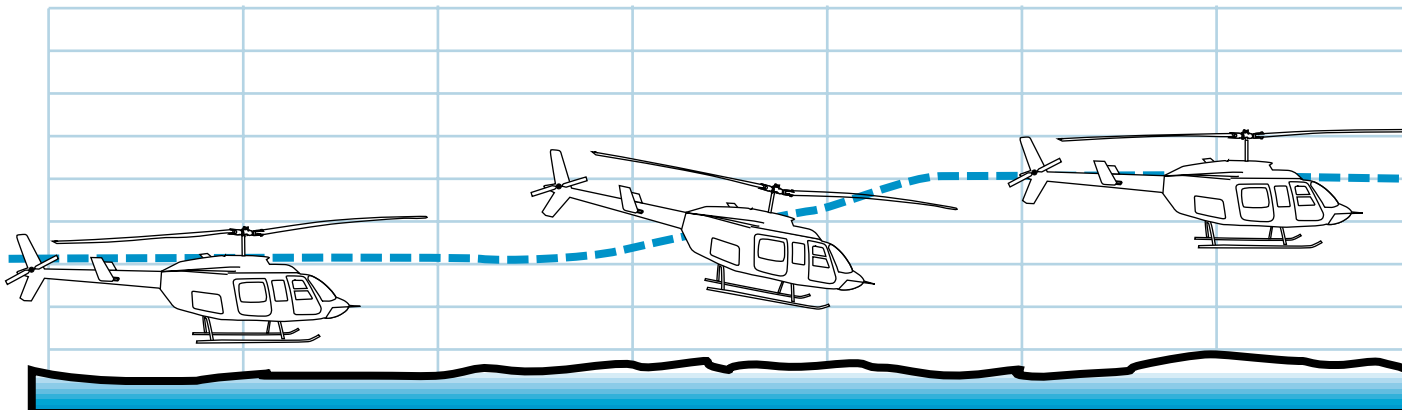


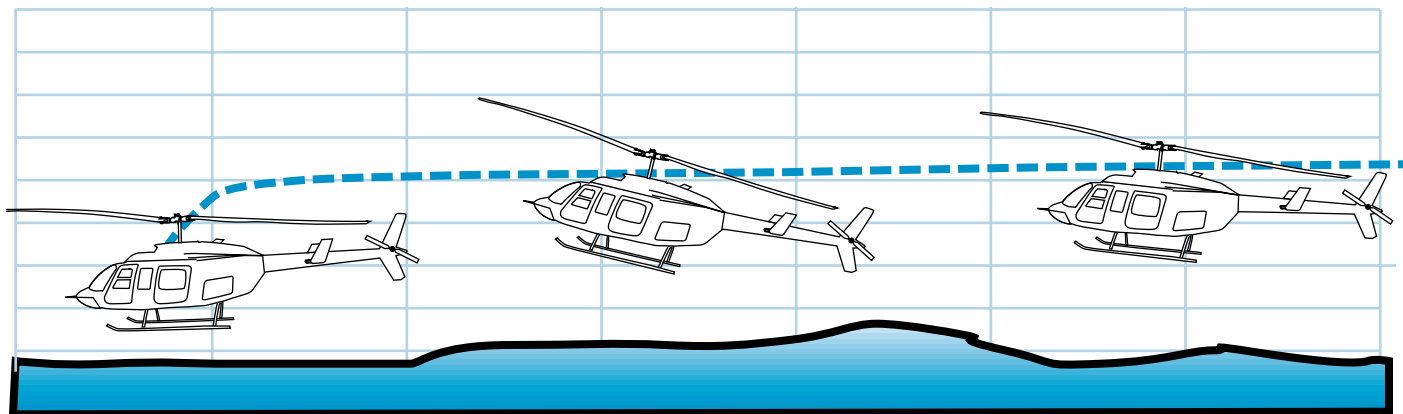
*Western Pilot **Ken Host** completes a safety check of the Bell 407 during a stop in Frisco. The aircraft seats six and has an average ground speed of 130 miles-per-hour.*

lines," Naill said.

**Dave Tiede, James Jensen and Duane Powell** of the Craig line crew work with Kremmling Linemen Naill and **Ron Burbridge** on most projects. Together the Kremmling and Craig teams have about 830 miles of high voltage transmission line to maintain.

"The primary use (of the helicopter) is line patrol, and it is a valuable tool that allows me to do a more frequent patrol—





## Aviation resources

**W**estern pilots in Upper Great Plains and Desert Southwest fly Bell 206 Long Ranger helicopters. Pilot **Tim Kennedy** is

based in Huron and Pilot **Roger Mothersbaugh** is based in Phoenix. These aviation resources can be scheduled by calling **Judy Stewart** in Huron at 605-353-9201 or Mothersbaugh in Phoenix at 602-352-2534.

The Sierra Nevada Region uses commercial aviation contracts for aerial line patrols and other aviation needs.

three times a year vs. once a year in pickups. I would venture to guess that 80 percent of major damage on the line is found during aerial patrol. These finds can be repaired before the lines fault. To go along

with that, 50 percent of the faults on lines are pinpointed with an aerial patrol—that takes far less time than trying to find the fault with a ground patrol,” Tiede said.

“We have also used the helicopter for other jobs, such as landing microwave dishes on towers in remote areas, hauling poles to job sites and getting materials to remote locations. It also provides us with a valuable tool for a medevac

mission, if the need should arise,” Tiede said.

Naill, Tiede and others who have first-hand experience using the helicopter are enthusiastic supporters of the aviation program and its versatility. “If I had the power, I would have a helicopter in my shop, just for my use,” Tiede said.

Environmental staff use Western’s aviation technology to monitor environmental problems and observe areas that would otherwise be nearly impossible to visit.

RM Environmental Protection Specialist **Rodney Jones** noted, “The environmental planning program at RMR uses the helicopter for a variety of purposes, including raptor surveys, endangered species and endangered species habitat

surveys, wetland surveys and general corridor overviews.”

The aircraft is also used for studies associated with transmission line rebuild projects or new transmission line projects and cultural resource surveys for projects such as wood pole replacements. Environmental work is scheduled when the helicopter is not being used for line patrol or maintenance.

RM Regional Manager **Joel Bladow** added, “RMR has used the helicopter a number of times to examine facilities where customers have requested interconnections such as new line taps or substation additions. By using the helicopter, we are able to inspect the facilities and surrounding area quickly. This helps to identify problems and potential ‘road blocks’ early in the process. With the fast turnaround required by our customers in today’s infrastructure-short systems, the helicopter is a valuable tool.”

Managers who use the helicopter for travel significantly reduce the number of man-hours spent traveling to meetings. Instead of taking three days from an executive’s schedule for a one-hour meeting, the helicopter can reduce “windshield time” by two days. Consider the cost savings of two unnecessary days on the road. When multiplied by several meeting participants, each driving separate vehicles, the numbers are notable.

“The technology should be used to our greatest advantage,” said Host, who added, “We may not always be able to meet someone’s request due to prior obligations, but we certainly try our best.”

To schedule the Bell 407 helicopter, call **Eileen Hollan** at 970-461-7290. 📞